

## A summary assessment of the Agritourism Experience in Poland

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**Abstract:** This paper presents the nature, scale and types of agritourism as experienced in Poland where both in terms of occupation and social phenomenon it has been accepted as a new economic activity by the rural population. First, the author explains the origins of agritourism in Poland, which are different to the countries of Western Europe, revealing particularities in terminology. Next, the major achievements and issues regarding the development of agritourism in Poland are presented, both in practice and theory. The author states that overall on balance the experience is positive and that two development processes can be differentiated: exogenous and endogenous. The endogenous one poses a challenge for Polish agritourism in search of a new identity.

**Key Words:** rural tourism, agritourism, types of agritourism, evolution of agritourism, rural development, Eastern Europe; Poland

### Un resumen de la evaluación de la experiencia de Agroturismo en Polonia

**Resumen:** Ese artículo presenta la escala y los tipos de agroturismo experimentados en Polonia, donde, tanto al nivel ocupacional como social, ha sido considerado como una nueva forma de actividad económica por la población rural. En primer lugar, el autor explica los orígenes del agroturismo en Polonia, que son diferentes a los de los países de Europa Occidental, y muestra sus particularidades en la terminología. A continuación, se muestran los principales logros y problemas del desarrollo del agroturismo en Polonia, tanto en la práctica como en la teoría. El autor afirma que, globalmente, la experiencia es positiva y que se pueden diferenciar dos procesos de desarrollo: exógeno y endógeno. El endógeno plantea un desafío para el agroturismo polaco en la búsqueda de una nueva identidad.

**Palabras Clave:** turismo rural, agroturismo, tipos de agroturismo, evolución de agro-turismo; desarrollo rural Europa del Este; Polonia

### 1. Introduction

The tourism experience may be viewed from different perspectives, *e.g.* sociological, physical, anthropological, economic, geographical and psychological, with an important link to the sustainability discussion. The process may be analysed not only from the point of view of the tourists, but also of tourism suppliers or “creators” (local stakeholders). Different authors disagree about the definition of tourism experience. Usually, it is treated as an element

of consumption (Prentice *et al.*, 1998; Urry, 1990) whose important aspects include visual impressions (looking, watching), but also taste, smell and other stimuli, all potentially contributing to “place authenticity”. This kind of experience, resulting from sensorial perception, is described in ways often contradicting each other (Cohen, 1979; MacCannell, 2002; Urry, 2007), but agreeing in the purpose of seeking high quality.

The direct provision of different forms of accommodation and attractions has occurred in Poland, increasing local tourism suppliers’ experience.

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The tourists' experiences, in form of impressions, sensations or knowledge gained based on their observation of reality and events, are also of concern to tourism creators. The issue of the tourism experience may then be approached from a planning and management perspective (e.g. Gannon, 1993; McGehee, 2007). It may also be studied in terms of quantitative and qualitative effects/impacts on host communities (Mathieson and Wall, 1982; Krippendorf, 1987) that result from a set of activities and social relations, as well as from the behaviour of tourism creators. The author uses the latter, qualitative, approach for analysing the development of agritourism in Poland.

The aim of the paper is to present the agritourism experience in Poland, both practically and conceptually, where both in terms of occupation and as a social phenomenon, it may be regarded as a new and relevant form of economic activity. This new type of tourism was developed 'from scratch', despite the continued tradition of leisure in the Polish countryside. The author presents not only the most important achievements and successes, but also critical issues in the development of agritourism in Poland, also discussing future challenges for this activity.

## 2. Literature review

Recreation in rural areas in Europe has a long tradition, as stressed by several authors, such as Schöppner (1988) or Oppermann (1996), and in Poland by Leszczycki (1938), Warszyńska and Jackowski (1979), and Dziegieć (1995). Agritourism as a particular component of rural tourism has been discussed by Clarke (1999), Nilsson (2002), and Phillip *et al.* (2010). Arguments for not treating agritourism as synonymous with rural tourism have been presented by many authors (e.g. Arnold and Staudacher, 1981; Deroi, 1991; Embacher, 1994).

Majewski and Lane (2001: 44) mention that the early appearance of agritourism as a form of rural tourism placed it in a prominent position. This thesis was confirmed by the bibliography of rural tourism, compiled by Lane in 1994 for the OECD, which showed that most studies referring to rural tourism focus on agritourism (Lane, 1994a). Similar observations were made by Wojciechowska (2003) when compiling the Polish bibliography of agritourism and rural tourism for the period, 1990-2002, also analysing the research undertaken from 1990-2007. Dividing that period into several sections allowed the author to grasp the most significant transformations in the Polish literature concerning rural tourism. They are worth a brief presentation.

In the first period - 1990-1992 - the authors of Polish publications primarily showed the possibilities of tourism development in rural areas, using examples from Western European countries. Also the practical guidebooks for the inhabitants of rural areas popularized these methods of stimulating the rural community as it was done in those countries (e.g. Wojciechowska, 1992).

In the next period - 1993-1995 - authors discussed the conditions, opportunities and issues of agritourism development in Poland, pointing to the advantages of agritourism as an economic activity, but with a mainly theoretical perspective. The terminology they used was vague, as the terms "agritourism" and "rural tourism" were applied interchangeably.

In 1996-1999, the scope of the issues studied was becoming considerably larger, likewise the number of researchers from different disciplines dealing with agritourism and increasingly interested in this phenomenon (agriculture, economics, geography, sociology). In that period, understanding gained in other disciplines was used in many academic publications. However, those presenting field research mostly contained descriptive information.

After 2000, more and more research integrating theory and practice has appeared where results concern both theory and practice. For local stakeholders' (practitioners) use, special methods have been developed for specific projects, such as village branding (Szalewska, 2000). Some publications presented after 2004 contained theoretical concepts and models, such as:

- a model of the rural tourism market (Bott-Alama, 2004),
- a model of agritourism development effects (Wojciechowska, 2006),
- agritourism farm economics and the relations between agricultural production and agritourism (Sznajder and Przezbórska, 2006),
- the idea of tourist function development levels in rural areas in Poland (Durydiwka, 2007),
- types of agritourism farms and their spatial differentiation in Poland; profiles of agritourism farm owners (Wojciechowska, 2007a),
- defining the terms and terminology system regarding rural and agritourism (Majewski, 2005, Wojciechowska, 2007b).

In 2010 several publications presented the achievements of Polish agritourism over a twenty-year period, but many critical remarks could also be found (e.g. Bednarek-Szczepeńska, 2011; Wojciechowska, 2011).

European Union programs additionally conditioned the development of the Polish literature

on the subject: national reports presented the conditions of Polish agritourism development, and other publications, directed at more practical approaches, like guidebooks, catalogues, maps, *etc.* also appeared. The programs furthermore enabled many practitioners and academics to study the development of agritourism in other countries, not only through seminars, exchange of publications and workshop materials, but also directly through research trips.

In conclusion, it must be stressed that the range of issues discussed is wide and has visibly changed over time in the Polish academic literature. Initially, the focus was on general, conceptual issues, such as general development opportunities and directions, often in the context of the Western European experience. Next, attention was redirected to the consequences of agritourism development, presented through local examples, which in turn became the basis for creating models and theoretical concepts. Such changes are typical of recent research areas and must be taken into account when reflecting on the future of agritourism in particular destination contexts.

### 3. Methodology

This paper is the distillation of the author's research undertaken on agritourism development over many years, starting from 1990, initially on the subject of stimulating local communities in the rural *gminas/communes* of central Poland by means of tourism. Gradually, the range of issues studied widened and a large quantity of statistical data has been collected, permitting a better understanding of the phenomenon and its evolution in this country. This data studied the dimension and evolution of agritourism nationwide and in individual regions, as well as opinions of stakeholders' regarding their motivations to get involved with agritourism, methods applied and results of this development. Surveys focused on the opinions of the inhabitants of rural areas, tourists arriving in the countryside, the people running agritourism farms and those involved in agritourism associations. This long-lasting research, enriched by field observation and literature review, as well as by participation in regional, national and international research projects, has resulted in a document, published in 2009, bringing together all aspects of Polish agritourism (Wojciechowska, 2009).

This paper contains selected parts of the last mentioned document, as well as new reflections on opportunities, critical issues and future challenges for agritourism in Poland. It is divided into four sections. The first explains the origins of agritourism

in Poland, which are different from West European countries, and also presents differences in terminology. The second part concerns the most important achievements and critical issues in agritourism development in practice, while the third part concerns theory. The fourth presents the challenges that must be faced yielding a new identity of agritourism in Poland.

### 4. The specificity of Polish agritourism origins and definitional issues

Tourism in rural areas in Poland has a long tradition. The first travellers to the countryside, before the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, were from the small intellectual and financial elite living in cities who spent their leisure time mainly at palaces, manor-estates or spas. As a result of urbanization in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the number of city dwellers taking recreational and health-improving trips increased. It was for them that accommodation started to be 'arranged' in the countryside, followed by the development of compact summer resort complexes (Kulczycki, 1977).

In the interwar period, when Poland had regained independence, rapid development and a spatial concentration of summer tourism occurred, with a clear distinction into summer resorts built close to large cities, and those appearing far away from urban centres at attractive locations, *i.e.* in the mountains and on the coast. At that time, the idea of the development of "summer tourism" was conceived, within which rural residents were being prepared to receive tourists. The institutions responsible for the organization of such activities were local and national administrative bodies. It was also the beginnings of research (including statistical) into summer tourism. Research terminology included the concept of "summer holiday tourism", the expression coming from "summer holiday-makers" - participants of this type of recreation (Leszczycki, 1938; Warszyńska and Jackowski, 1979).

The socio-political system established after World War II had an influence on tourism development in rural areas. The pre-war tradition of receiving holiday-makers was regarded as a private business, which was, in fact, contradicting the 'mandatory ideology'. In the first years after World War II, trips to the countryside were limited, and in some areas the recreational function disappeared altogether. This was observable in the rural-urban fringe of large cities where summer resort settlements were being increasingly inhabited by new permanent residents. In the late 1950's, the idea of summer resorts in rural areas was re-activated, but it remained under state control

which actually hampered development and led to the appearance (especially in the 1980's) of the so-called 'accommodation black market', offering mainly accommodation to tourists. Tourism in rural areas was, at that stage, mostly centred in the holiday resorts belonging to state enterprises, as well as in urban inhabitants' second homes on their private plots of land. Various authors then started to discuss tourism in rural areas, mostly concerning second homes (Liszewski, 1987; Matczak, 1985).

The year 1989 was the beginning of economic and political transformation in Poland. Adopting the rules of the market economy resulted in many recreational facilities changing ownership, as well as in substantial changes of the way they were administered and developed. At the same time, opportunities for using foreign funding appeared which permitted new ways of stimulating rural areas through investment in tourism. Changes in the recreation style of tourists, who were looking for opportunities to enjoy a more individual, active and cognitively enriching recreation, were also observed. Following the example of Western Europe, associations, commune (*gmina*) 'unions' and foundations interested in tourism development appeared. Numerous brochures, catalogues and guides for the organizers (stakeholders) of tourism in rural areas were published. Simultaneously, many socially adverse phenomena, such as economic recession, the marginalization of agriculture as a means of supporting rural populations and impoverishment in rural areas were also found. Similar to Western countries, agritourism was identified as an opportunity to improve the declining situation of the agricultural sector and to offer an alternative source of income to farmers as well as a cheap and appealing type of recreation to tourists.

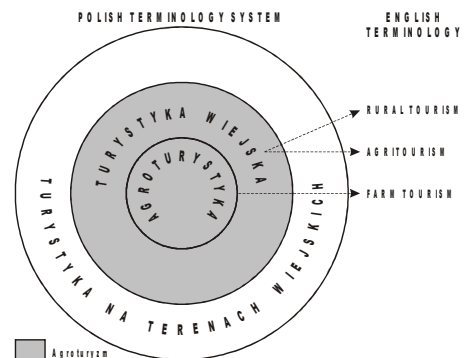
Agritourism – both as a term and a recognized tourism phenomenon – appeared in Poland at the time of the political-economic transformation. The idea of agritourism was "officially introduced" to the Polish countryside in 1991 by state institutions, mainly farming consultancy bodies, which started cooperation with similar institutions abroad. They first trained their own personnel, and then started to encourage and educate the rural populations to invest in agritourism. The campaign popularizing agritourism as a rural development tool was taken up by commune (*gmina*) councils and relevant ministries. They supported the development of agritourism (e.g. organizing courses for farmers), organizationally (e.g. counselling services) and legally (sanctioning farmers' exemption from income tax when letting up to five rooms).

It should be acknowledged that the introduction of agritourism in Poland, in the actual format, was institutional, thus continuing the traditional approach

to recreation in the countryside. The term, however, is quite new (derived from German), and signifies the method of generating tourism on farms, as popular in several West European countries. In Poland, it was developed "from scratch" (as referred above), when considering the skills and social experiences (with tourists) of rural inhabitants at that time. They had to learn the rules of agritourism, above all to understand that the innovation of agritourism lies in the readiness of a farmer's family to receive tourists at their home and to offer them an interesting program based on farming, the attractions of the countryside, and the local community's system of values. They had to see that this form of tourism takes place in conditions of a market economy, which means in a competitive context from both nearby and other regions. They had to learn to organize agritourism, earn money from it and cooperate with others in order to develop it.

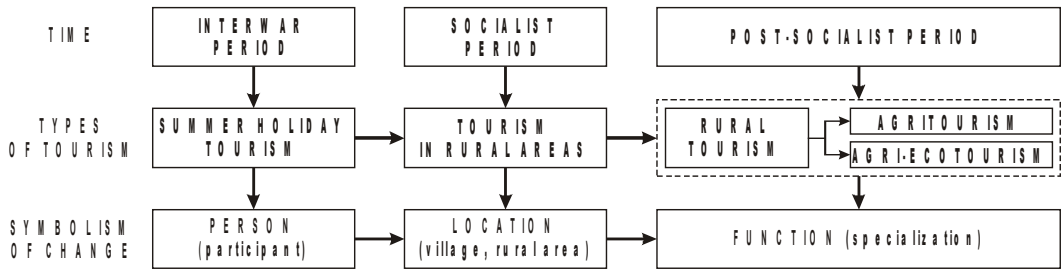
As mentioned above, the term *agroturystyka* (agritourism) in Poland was taken from foreign terminology. Initially, practitioners were unwilling to accept it, preferring native terms referring to recreation in rural areas. They often used old terminology, even from the interwar period, to refer to the newly generated tourism. Perhaps it was a way to get accustomed to something which was new, unfamiliar and came from outside. Various terms were used and understood quite freely both by practitioners and by scholars, until the mid-1990's. However, the semantic range of the term "agritourism", as well as other similar terms, was gradually established in the Polish academic literature. The set of terms is arranged hierarchically in Figure 1 to clarify the integration and connections between the mostly used concepts.

**Figure 1. The relation between Polish and English terms defining tourism in rural areas**



Source: developed and modified from Wojciechowska (2007b)

**Figure 2. Evolution of Polish terms defining tourism in rural areas**



The term with the narrowest semantic range is “*agroturystyka*” (agritourism). From the demand perspective, it is defined in Polish literature as a tourist’s stay on a farm, while from the supply perspective – as a tourist enterprise run by a family on their own farm. Thus, this term corresponds to the English term *farm tourism*<sup>1</sup>. The Polish term “*turystyka wiejska*” corresponds to two terms used in the English literature: *rural tourism* and *agritourism*. It refers to tourism and leisure stays in the countryside, e.g. in former agricultural buildings or at other facilities such as guest-houses, private rooms to let, etc., but still in areas shaped by agriculture.

The term “*turystyka na terenach wiejskich*” (tourism in rural areas) seems to be the creation of Polish academics, who consider it as having a wider semantic because it refers to areas defined as “rural” in the Polish legislation, quite distinct areas<sup>2</sup>, where tourism may be well-developed (recreation resorts, specialist recreation centres, complexes of second homes), and also those where nature dominates (e.g. marshes, lakes, forests, national parks). Similarly, the Polish concept of “*agroturyzm*” should be considered as a product of Polish academia and understood as including both “*agroturystyka*” and “*turystyka wiejska*”. The author believes that *agroturyzm* is a term that theoretically comprises all the issues referring to the spatial and temporal aspects of tourism related to the countryside, including its link to agriculture (Wojciechowska, 2009).

Compared to the English terms, the Polish terminology model has a distinct individuality. Another approach to the problem of terminology can be observed in the Russian literature, where researchers stress that they are just starting their studies, regarding both – practice and theory. The literature contains English terms, e.g. *rural tourism*, and their equivalents in Russian (Birzakov, 2005). The authors of definitions quote English or German authors (Birzakov, 2005; Klitsunova, 2004), but there are also numerous definitions by Russian

researchers. For example, Bulgakova defines *rural tourism (sielski turizm)* as follows: a particular type of tourism, comprising organized and unorganized forms of recreation at a rural destination for the purpose of coming closer to nature, learning about the rural style of life, and the traditions of running a farmstead – on a professional and amateur level (Bulgakova, 2003: 314). A slightly different definition is offered by Skoblikova, who claims that *rural tourism (sielski turizm)*, also referred to as *agroturizm* or *agroekoturizm*, is a form of tourism in a rural area, where tourists live the local style of life while staying at farms and in villages (Skoblikova, 2005: 47). Many Russian academics look at rural tourism and agritourism from the perspective of natural assets and nature protection (Panov, 2003; Drozdov, 2003; Mazurov, 2004; Starcieva, 2004), and treat the terms discussed as constituents of the ecotourism concept, thereby making rural, nature and ecotourism overlapping concepts.

An analysis of the terminology system used in Poland shows a continuous evolution of terms and their semantic ranges. Majewski and Lane claim that rural tourism is a constantly changing and developing; not a static concept (Majewski and Lane, 2001: 32), in fact like many others. This observation applies to the other terms discussed here as well. The evolution of the Polish terms and their semantic ranges from the time after the war until the present day are shown in Figure 2.

The diagram shows that in the interwar period, the terms defining tourism in rural areas focused on their participants (holiday-makers), in the next period on the place of recreation (countryside), and nowadays mainly refer to its function, or even specialization. Terms like ‘agritourism’, ‘ecotourism’, ‘alternative tourism’ or ‘sustainable tourism’ in particular, point to special tourism activities in rural areas, which may be more or less associated with farming, with nature tourism or other more specialist pursuits, as actually identified as a trend for the global rural tourism phenomenon (Lane, 2009).

In conclusion, it must be stressed that agritourism in Poland turned out to be a new form of tourism, for its participants (demand), organizers (supply) and the superstructure, as well. It was introduced institutionally and based on the experience of other countries, associated with the hope of it serving as a rural development tool. The term defining it has been accepted by practitioners, scholars and politicians alike, and belongs to the evolutionary hierarchical system of terms referring to tourism in rural areas.

### 5. Major achievements and issues of agritourism development in Poland based on actual experience

The achievements of Polish agritourism are numerous and varied, as briefly presented in Table 1 and discussed in this section. On a practical level, they should be considered within particular demand and supply dynamics. In the first case, the achievement is the creation of a new form of recreation for tourists, permitting accommodation on farms and farm visits. As far as supply is concerned, the main achievement is that inhabitants of rural areas have gained an additional and sometimes alternative source of income and a new occupation.

As a result of the popularization of agritourism, other organisations generating and supporting its development appeared. They are mostly agritourism associations, which together with the Polish Federation of Rural Tourism (PFTW) form an agritourism self-governing body which deals with legal aspects and lobbies for agritourism development. The Federation's achievement was the establishment of categories of rural accommodation in 1997. In 2012, the rules of categorization were changed on the basis of experience in Poland. Moreover, the Federation promotes agritourism on

the [www.agroturystyka.pl](http://www.agroturystyka.pl) network and is a member of the European rural tourism accommodation association *EUROGITES* since 1997.

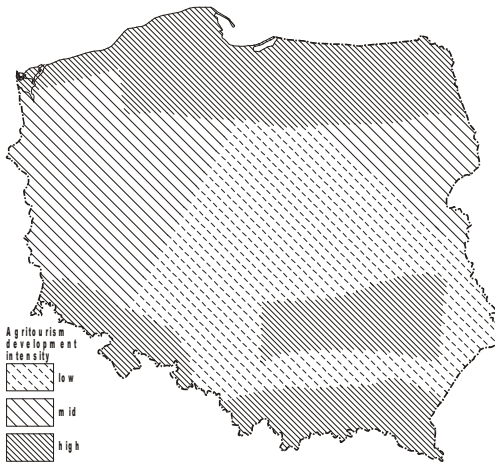
The quantitative effects may be measured by the scale and evolution of the accommodation facilities in the country. The first comprehensive evaluation of agritourism development in Poland was undertaken in 1996 and an inventory showed that there were 1952 farms receiving tourists, offering 15,653 bed places (Raport o stanie wiejskiej bazy noclegowej w Polsce, 1997). Since then, the number has increased, however difficult the identification of the exact number of agritourism facilities. From the very beginning the number has fluctuated. During many years, many agritourism farms have disappeared, but many new ones have opened, too. This fluctuation is not always taken into account in the statistics, therefore these are only estimates. In 2007, there were over 87,000 bed places in 8,800 agritourism facilities (Klembowska and Nowaczyk, 2008: 118-122). According to the Institute of Tourism, in 2009 there was a decrease in the number of facilities to 5,473, and in the number of bed places to 57,100 ([www.intur.com.pl](http://www.intur.com.pl)). However, in 2010, the Central Statistical Office registered 7,000 agritourism facilities with 82,700 bed-places. They were found in 55% of the total Polish communes (*gminas*), as single or combined units (Bednarek-Szczepańska, 2011: 261). Some villages show a compact and integrated concentration of agritourism farms. They are distributed in certain zones of the country - the mountains (in the south), uplands (south-east) and a section of the lake district including the coastal lowland (in the north) (Figure 3). Thus, they are located above all in tourism zones rich in natural and landscape attractions (the north and the south of the country), and much less in the farming belt of the lowlands in central Poland.

**Table 1. Major achievements and critical issues in the development of Polish agritourism**

Achievements	Critical Issues
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- encouraging the rural population to find a new source of income and occupation;</li> <li>- creating a new form of leisure;</li> <li>- creating organisations which can generate and enhance development;</li> <li>- creating legal, administrative and organizational development mechanisms;</li> <li>- establishing a clear positive role for the multifunctional development of villages and farms.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- the ephemeral character or inefficiency of development-generating rural tourism activity, insufficient understanding of innovation as a constant challenge;</li> <li>- overlapping activities and competences of pro-development institutions; a lack of integration and weak position ) of agritourism self-governing bodies;</li> <li>- weakness and inconsistency of legal, administrative and organizational development mechanisms.</li> </ul>

Source: developed and modified from Wojciechowska (2011)

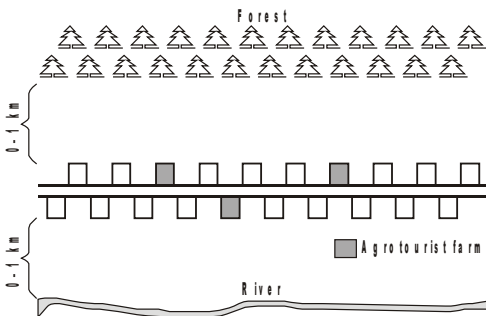
**Figure 3. The geographical variation of agritourism development intensity in Poland**



Source: developed and modified from Wojciechowska (2009)

The author studied the precise location of agritourist farms, *i.e.* their location within the settlement system and natural environment. The studies were conducted along the Odra River valley and other landscape zones of the country (lowlands, uplands and mountains). They enabled the author to construct a model of their location in the geographical environment, permitting a simultaneous analysis of the intensity of agritourism development in different parts of the country. The main elements of this model are the countryside, the forest and the water.

**Figure 4. The location model of Polish agritourist farms**



Source: Wojciechowska (2009)

As visible in Figure 4, agritourist farms are usually situated in a village, close to or away from its centre, within a short distance from the neighbours (several dozen meters). Outside the village, in the hamlets, there are few agritourist farms. The main assets of such a farm are its attractive natural surroundings. It is best when the distance from the farm to a water reservoir and forest does not exceed one kilometer. A river, lake or pond give the tourists an opportunity to swim and fish, being significant assets of the recreational offer, similar to forests of different sizes, mainly used for hiking and nature observation. In this model, the location features resulting from the natural conditions in the nearest surroundings are much more important than the settlement features, determining their tourist attractiveness. According to the agritourist farms owners, such elements as nature, forest, water or historical monuments significantly increase the chances for their success (*e.g.* Wojciechowska, 2000; Wojciechowska *et al.*, 2006).

Agritourism farms mainly offer guest rooms (about 76% of the total offer) and sometimes holiday flats and campsites (12% each). Farms generally offer up to five guest rooms, which are free from income taxes (77%). It contrasts with what is offered in many other European countries, where the main offer is holiday flats/apartments (Bott-Alama, 2004: 56; Sznajder and Przezbórska, 2006: 148). The Polish reality results from the fact that at the time of introducing agritourism, it was mostly rooms that were let, being less costly than investing in fully equipped holiday apartments. Another tendency is that in most cases the offer consists of accommodation only (45-55%), followed by an offer of accommodation + board (20-30%). The full offer, consisting of accommodation + board + attractions constitutes 15-20% of all offers (Wojciechowska, 2009).

Currently, given the tourist functions that an agritourist farm may perform, the most popular is the general recreation offer. It usually features some attractions, like having a barbecue, mushroom picking, cycling or sunbathing. It is followed by a specialized recreation offer, which usually features horse riding (for recreational, sporting or rehabilitation purposes), as well as fishing in natural or fish breeding water reservoirs. This particular offer contains other attractions as well, connected with winter sports, especially in the mountainous regions (*e.g.* skiing or tobogganing). The third in line is the health-oriented offer, quite broadly understood, because the very fact that the hosts serve meals cooked from their own agricultural products is promoted by them as the health function. Other

attractions include eating dietetic or vegetarian food, having the possibility to sleep on hay in a barn, or being engaged in farm work. The least frequent offers are those related to specialized services, such as the possibility to do recreational gymnastics, having massages or rehabilitation training. Finally, we have the educational and entertainment offer, both of which occur at similar frequency. The former one is connected with running “green schools”, organizing school lessons for children and teenagers, or classes (also for adults) teaching them new or rare skills (*e.g.* baking home-made bread or glass painting). This particular offer is based on the different skills and talents of the hosts. Tourists who book their stay at such farmsteads even one year in advance, are generally attracted by the entertainment offer, which is particularly popular among groups of friends who want to spend some time having fun together. This offer does not always require a particular program for the guests, but rather an appropriate preparation of the facility (*e.g.* dining rooms or food provisions).

Summing up this part of the article, we should point out that agritourism offers differ according to the natural and cultural attractions of a given region, rather than the skills or licences held by agritourism farm owners or members of their families. The agritourism offer is based more on the elements of rural life, *i.e.* on the elements of the surrounding countryside, its culture, nature and other attractions, than on agriculture.

It is worth mentioning that for 20 years the agritourism accommodation infrastructure has constituted 3-4% of the overall number of accommodation facilities in Poland (Bednarek-Szczepańska, 2011: 265; Wojciechowska, 2009: 115). During the summer holiday season, over 80,000 bed places on agritourism farms provide the potential for about five million person-days<sup>3</sup>, as well as being a source of direct income for about 9,000 families (8,900 facilities in 2011). In reality, bed-places on agritourism farms are used mostly in the summer holidays and during the rest of the year only in a percentage of about 20-30% (Bednarek-Szczepańska, 2011; Wojciechowska, 2009). On a national scale, these figures may not seem very impressive, and more specific studies may simply show that over the period of 20 years only some individuals have been successful. However, the author is convinced that this does not diminish the significance of agritourism in the multi-functional development of individual villages and farms. Careful and rational introduction of agritourism in the rural space may contribute to many positive changes, both in the physical form of the local settlements, in setting

into value certain local agriculture products and cultural assets and in widening the inhabitants' horizons and “opening” their mentality. In the light of research undertaken on agritourism in Poland, farm owners see the following positive changes resulting from the activity: possibility of learning and broadening horizons, learning of foreign languages, meeting new friends through the activity, better relationships within the own families (Bott-Alama, 2004; Szalewska, 2000; Połomski, 2010; Wojciechowska, 2009).

However, there are also many critical issues connected with the practical side of agritourism. Table 1 presents them divided into three groups. The first one concerns the ephemeral character of activities (both owners of agritourism farms, and associations), as well as their invisibility in the tourism market and lack of understanding of innovation as a constant challenge. The majority of regional and local associations were founded in the 1990's. In 2010, only 10% of them had been operating for over 15 years (Wojciechowska, 2009: 95). Most function for a short period of time – about 5 years. This means that many agritourism associations founded in the 1990's do not exist any more. The position of the Federation, which is the main organization, is weakening. The number of member associations seemingly stays the same (c.40-45), but they are not the same associations continuing the same activities ([www.agroturystyka.pl](http://www.agroturystyka.pl)). Two or three times as many associations do not belong to the Federation, and operate alongside, eventually duplicating efforts and clearly resulting in a sub-optimal coordination of agritourism in Poland. Moreover, the weakness and inconsistency of the legal, administrative and organizational mechanisms contributes to an unnecessary overlapping of activities and competences between those involved in or supporting agritourism development. Some are becoming dangerously competitive with each other, creating more harm than opportunities for a successful and competitive agritourism development in the country.

In conclusion, it should be stressed that agritourism in Poland has developed spontaneously, although introduced by a top-down approach making use of available funding and copying concepts from other Western European countries. As a “new” form of tourism (in its actual shape), over a relatively short period of time (20 years), it has created both supply and demand, as well as achieved an established position within the national tourism system. Despite many problems accompanying agritourism development, overall the practical experience of agritourism should be regarded as positive, though still in constant adaptation and yet improvable.



**Table 2. Major achievements and issues in research on Polish agritourism**

Achievements	Critical Issues
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– conducting extensive research and analysis;</li> <li>– stimulating research in a variety of disciplines (e.g. agriculture, economics, sociology, geography, pedagogy);</li> <li>– establishing regularities in the cognitive process and creating theoretical models in various disciplines.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– poor methodological integration;</li> <li>– research progress is clearly rather quantitative;</li> <li>– difficulties concerning the comparability and repeatability of research results;</li> <li>– lacking consensus and constant terminological discussion which hampers the integration of theory;</li> <li>– ineffective integration of theory and practice.</li> </ul>

Source: developed and modified from Wojciechowska (2011)

## 6. Polish agritourism in academia

In the field of academia, agritourism achievements are both quantitative and qualitative. The first includes the constantly growing number of academic publications, conferences, seminars, research programmes, as well as centres or institutions, which include the word 'agritourism' in their titles. This reflects the broad study field of agritourism. Here, representatives of different disciplines are looking for answers to questions concerning agritourism from the point of view of their own academic fields. As a result, agritourism is studied in disciplines such as agriculture, economics, sociology and tourism geography (Table 2).

A qualitative achievement is the fact that there are an increasing number of studies which show how agritourism develops, having achieved some degree of maturity in their specific fields of research. The authors of these publications have formulated and developed a detailed methodology for agritourism studies. This process, however, has taken place differently in different disciplines. A literature review shows that researchers from different disciplines study agritourism practically independently of one another and in the terminology appropriate to a given discipline. An effect of such an approach is a poor integration of knowledge from different disciplines. Some conferences gather representatives of many disciplines in order to work out an interdisciplinary approach, and Polish agritourism symposia<sup>4</sup> invite practitioners to take part in them. Despite these efforts, it must be said that the interdisciplinary approach is still underdeveloped. It is easy to notice the lack of research projects bringing together specialists from different fields to seek answers to the same questions. The interdisciplinary approach would make it possible to create a common platform for discussion among representatives of different disciplines involved in agritourism studies and would certainly benefit the development of the understanding of the phenomenon as well as the

preparation of a sound basis of action. During the 20 years of agritourism in Poland, no such platform has been formed.

Another issue concerning academic research in agritourism is the fact that progress in these studies is clearly mostly quantitative, although still typically not representative of the nationwide phenomenon. There are a multitude of publications and expert assessments, but the research results they contain are very modest, mostly of descriptive nature, often not representative and very rarely regarding the whole country (partly due to a lack of uniform and continuous statistical data). This leads to yet another issue, namely difficulties with the comparability of research results, both in time and space. The situation does not encourage researchers to repeat their work in order to analyse the changes taking place over time. On top of that, continuous terminological discussion regarding the term 'agritourism' in the diverse disciplinary fields works against theoretical integration. This in turn means poor integration of theory and practice. The number of studies is seemingly large, but if we look at the results, they are not very impressive. This is confirmed by the fact that there is little research concerning differences in demand in Poland, as regards the range, structure, features and trends of the changes which are so important for the practitioners, namely for strategically managing demand. Kastenholz (2004) made a similar observation for North Portugal.

Concluding, agritourism is a relatively new phenomenon in the Polish academic life, not to say a new research field. It is an example showing that practice may stimulate theoretical studies, as well as provide research fields and issues.

## 7. Seeking a new identity for Polish agritourism

The future development of Polish agritourism may follow two patterns. The first one may be called exogenous, and the other – the new or endogenous

approach. The former has lasted for about 15 years and was a somehow spontaneous reaction on typically external factors, such as:

- international cooperation structures challenging the country's integration,
- European Union aid or structural funds (for example the Programmes PHARE TOURIN and SAPARD)<sup>5</sup>.

This development was strongly inspired by the experiences of other countries. Exogenous factors played a major role at that time. Within the national space, this 'inspired' agritourism, *i.e.* agritourism farms and associations, appearing at different places like 'railway engines' running without a timetable, pulling other 'railway car' behind them and losing many on the way.

However, around 2005, when the aid programs came to an end, and the EU structural programs had yet to be introduced, new difficulties emerged in the development of agritourism. They were mostly connected with the increasing international competition in the tourism market, rural tourists' growing expectations, the need to provide a high quality offer, and the consequent financial expenditures both agritourism farms and associations need to face. These and other increasingly visible obstacles and challenges gave the most persevering and experienced actors in agritourism in Poland an impulse to seek a new development model.

Based on the past experience in the field and the recognition of the before-mentioned unsolved problems, reflected in much of the academic reflections, one may suggest that Polish agritourism has been looking for a new identity for at least five years and on different levels: organizational, social and spatial. The direction of this search is being set (*e.g.* during conferences) by the Polish 'Federation of Agritourism Association' which stresses the need to constantly adapt to a changing and challenging reality. The aim of the organization is to make the changes creative, oriented towards new ideas, most of all on the basis of endogenous resources.

This endogenous model is a challenge for Polish agritourism in the pursuit of its new identity and this involves finding answers to questions, which are currently concerning practitioners and academics alike, such as the questions regarding:

- 1) What kind of agritourism offer should be the target and how to differentiate this offer spatially? What to offer around large Polish cities, what in traditional villages or in tourism zones in rural areas? To what extent should the differentiation of the offer be spontaneous or follow a plan?
- 2) Should there be a differentiation within the agritourism activity regulations distinguishing

between agritourism as an additional source of income for farming families or as the main source of income (business) for families or individuals living in a rural area? If so, how?

- 3) How can the Polish Federation of Agritourism Associations change the image of Polish agritourism, so that the organization can coordinate its development?
- 4) What should be taken into account in the spatial planning of the Polish countryside as far as agritourism development is concerned?
- 5) To what extent can a local community decide on the scale of agritourism development on individual farms or on the tourism facilities in their village, to avoid damage to the spatial system, heritage, landscape, *etc.* of individual settlements?
- 6) How can this community face the phenomenon of 'becoming a part of the tourism attraction it offers', a phenomenon which has caused a number of the internal and external conflicts observed in Polish agritourism?

The last mentioned problem is highlighted by the sociologist Polomski, who describes the life of the residents of villages situated in protected nature areas (within the premises of the Bieszczadzki National Park). He uses the metaphor of the 'monkey and the open-air museum' for the phenomenon he studies, where villages stop being places of food production, lose their farming roles for the benefit of tourist functions, providing entertainment and fun, making tourists look at the residents like 'monkeys in an open-air museum' (Polomski, 2010: 129). Not all residents are happy with this role, not all believe such activities to be appropriate for them. The lack of choice of activity often results in migration, while staying in the village without getting involved in tourist services is often associated with being pushed to the brink of social life. It is an example of a conflict inside the local community, but also conflicts resulting from how such communities are perceived by other, especially the neighboring ones, must be taken into account. Descriptions of such delicate cases can also be found in Polish literature on social impacts of agritourism development in some cases.

In face of the above problems, it seems important to provide local communities with knowledge of the optimum and incontrovertible indicators of agritourism development, possibly in many aspects. The suggestion seems reasonable in the context of the spatial development of every village in a given region in Poland. It makes sense to give agritourism its place in the postulated vision of spatial rural development, including a dimension

of socio-economic development. The possibility of presenting the scale of agritourism development effects (its benefits and costs) should be very important for local communities, too. This knowledge on the possible negative side and limitations of agritourism may avoid disappointment caused by excessive hopes connected with tourism development. It also becomes possible to define the optimum number of agritourism farms for a given locality, which will enable the community to choose the form of development, *e.g.* as an agritourism village or rather with individual accommodation facilities belonging to a regional or national network. This statement may be confirmed by the case of the village of Ślasków Mały. It is located near Kielce city in Góry Świętokrzyskie Region (in the south-east of the country on the uplands). In the 1990's this village was announced as 'an exemplary agritourism village'. In 1999 it had 25 agritourism farms, while in 2010 – only 10. The large number of agritourism farms in a village, without any significant tourism assets resulted in social conflict (Wojciechowska, 2011: 71). By defining the limits of agritourism development, it will be possible to prevent its excessive growth in a given village. Uncontrolled and spontaneous development over a period of time is not favorable from the perspective of neither tourists nor inhabitants. Sharpley and Sharpley suggest that tourism and recreation play a pivotal role in debates concerning the extent to which rural areas should be developed or conserved (Sharpley and Sharpley, 1997). However, geographical space is a strictly limited resource (Urry, 2007: 73), in agritourism as well.

The questions above show that the time has come to review the present tight legal and organizational 'corset', as well as the development directions of Polish agritourism. It may be said that in the past 20 years, both practice and academic research have been focused on techniques supporting its development. Now, a reflection on how to better plan agritourism development is needed. The researchers' task should therefore be to help planning agritourism, trying to consider both the tendencies and forecasts of the tourism market and the socio-economic development context of the countryside and the specific territories and communities where agritourism is put into practice, aiming at sustainable tourism development benefitting all stakeholders involved (Saxena *et al.*, 2007; Kastenholtz, 2004). In this context, the establishment of rules and techniques for measuring and evaluating the effects of agritourism activity is also needed to assess its impacts and help recommend an optimum level of the activity

and to more successfully manage it within the overall rural development process.

## 8. Conclusions

The Polish agritourism is marked by very specific origins, shaped by a historical, political, economic, cultural and social context, a correspondingly particular course of development and own terminology system (Wojciechowska, 2009). Contrary to Western European countries, where agritourism has developed in a relatively organic evolutionary process, with development mainly caused by endogenous factors, in Poland it started in a rather 'revolutionary', abrupt way and was originally caused by exogenous factors, implying a series of difficulties and challenges many agritourism actors face nowadays. This approach is gradually changing to a more endogenous model of development, better linked to endogenous resources and competences and thereby, arguably, with an enhanced potential to further sustainable agritourism development in Poland (Saxena *et al.*, 2007). Considering the evolution of agritourism in Poland, despite the difficulties of systematically and rigorously assessing its scale, structure and patterns over time and despite "ups and downs" over time and some clearly negative examples observed (*e.g.* Polomski, 2010; Wojciechowska 2000, 2011), the activity has achieved a certain level of maturity, with the global balance of the agritourism experience in Poland, on both practical and academic levels, being positive.

The present challenge for Polish agritourism is the pursuit of a new identity, based on the before mentioned endogenous factors. This new agritourism development approach should, in fact, yield a more satisfactory development for all involved, produce higher levels of tourist satisfaction and agritourism competitiveness, while simultaneously setting into value endogenous assets, without jeopardizing natural nor cultural heritage nor social structures and identity of local communities, in short yielding sustainable rural tourism development (Garrod *et al.*, 2006; Kastenholtz, 2004; Saxena *et al.*, 2007). Whether benefits are possible, and whether the role of agritourism will be perceived positively, depends on those involved in organizing it. They decide how well they can use the positive opportunities given by agritourism, and to what extent they allow negative influences to intervene. For these people agritourism, like technology, cannot be good or bad in itself. What turns out to be the final effect in a given situation depends on the

skills of the agritourism provider and the ways it is exploited.

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[www.agroturystyka.pl](http://www.agroturystyka.pl) (11.02.2013)

[www.intur.com.pl/jurek098m.htm](http://www.intur.com.pl/jurek098m.htm) (10.02.2010)

## Notes

- 1 The hierarchy of terms in the English language literature was mentioned by Jansen-Verbeke (1990), who wrote that *rural tourism* has the widest semantic range and means 'all tourism in the countryside', while *agritourism* is its sub-term, because it concerns 'farming-related tourism'. The term of the narrowest semantic range, which is subordinate to the ones mentioned above, is *farm tourism*, which means 'tourist stays on farms'. The definition and forms of tourism in rural areas have also been discussed by Lane, 1994b; McGehee, 2007; Roberts and Hall 2001; Sharpley and Sharpley, 1997, and others.
- 2 In Poland each area outside of a town/city is termed as "rural area", corresponding to about 96% of the country's territory.
- 3 Person-days is a unit of measurement, which tells how many total days a tourists spent at the destination. Person-days corresponds to the product of the number of days of summer holiday and bed places on agritourism farms.

Example calculation: July – 31days and August – 31days, total: 62 days and the product: 62 (days) x 80,000 (bed places) = 4,960,000 ≈ 5,000,000 person-days.

<sup>4</sup> They have been held since 1993, at first annually, and since 2001 every two years. In 2013 the fifteenth symposium was held.

<sup>5</sup> PHARE - Poland and Hungary: Assistance Program for Restructuring the countries' Economies, created in 1989, as one of the three pre-accession instruments financed by the European Union to assist the applicant countries of Central and Eastern Europe in their preparations for joining the European Union. In Poland were three programmes (Tourin I, II, III) directed to the development of tourism (<http://ec.europa.eu/>).

SAPARD - Special Accession Programme for Agriculture and Rural Development, established in June 1999 by the Council of the European Union to help countries of Central and Eastern Europe deal with the problems of the structural adjustment in their agricultural sectors and rural areas (<http://ec.europa.eu/>).

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